

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 108495
ORIGIN EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 (ISO) R

DRAFTED BY EUR/SE:RCEWING:EUR/P:WZIMMERMANN:LB

APPROVED BY EUR/SE:RCEWING

-----192138Z 092323 /40

R 131618Z MAY 77

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMCONSUL ISTANBUL

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY SOFIA

UNCLAS STATE 108495

E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PDIP, CDES (BATJER, HELENE A.)

SUBJECT: MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR HELENE BATJER

1. MESSAGES FROM AMBASSADOR MACOMBER AND CONGEN ISTANBUL WERE CONVEYED TO MRS. WILLIAMS AT MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR HELENE BATJER MAY 10 ALONG WITH LETTER FROM ACTING SECRETARY. SERVICE ATTENDED BY A NUMBER OF DEPARTMENT OF STATE COLLEAGUES, CHARGE OF TURKISH EMBASSY, AND FRIENDS.

2. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF EULOGY DELIVERED AT SERVICE BY ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EUROPEAN AFFAIRS JAMES G. LOWENSTEIN.

BEGIN TEXT. REMEMBERING HELENE BATJER. HELENE BATJER WAS AN UNCOMMON PERSON. WHEN SHE JOINED THE STATE DEPARTMENT IN 1945, SHE HAD TWO DISADVANTAGES. IN THOSE DAYS IT WAS A STRONG DISADVANTAGE TO BE A WOMAN IN THE FOREIGN SERVICE. HELENE HAD TO SUCCEED IN A BUREAUCRACY IN WHICH THERE WAS A GREAT DEAL OF INGRAINED PREJUDICE. MOREOVER, SHE CHOSE
UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 STATE 108495

AS HER AREA OF CONCENTRATION THE BALKANS -- A REGION WHERE SOCIETIES AND GOVERNMENTS HAVE BEEN EXTREMELY CONSERVATIVE, PATRIARCHAL AND MALE-ORIENTED.

NEITHER OF THESE LIABILITIES SEEMED TO BOTHER HELENE. SHE WAS NOT ONE TO SHRINK FROM A CHALLENGE, AND SHE LIKED TO EXPLODE MYTHS AND PUNCTURE SHIBBOLETHS. SO IT CAME AS NO

SURPRISE TO HER FRIENDS THAT SHE BECAME ONE OF THE FOREMOST EXPERTS IN THE FOREIGN SERVICE ON THE BALKANS, SERVING IN SOFIA, ATHENS, BELGARDE, ZAGREB, AND -- HER LAST POST -- AS CONSUL GENERAL IN ISTANBUL.

PERHAPS IT WAS HER LOVE OF HISTORY THAT DREW HELENE TO THE BALKANS, WHICH HAS FOR CENTURIES BEEN A CROSSROADS BETWEEN EAST AND WEST. THE YUGOSLAV WRITER MILOVAN DJILAS, IN ONE OF HIS SHORT STORIES, CAPTURED THIS SENSE OF HISTORY. HE WROTE AS FOLLOWS:

OURS IS ONLY ONE OF THE WAYS OF LIFE THAT HAVE BEEN AND THAT WILL BE. THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE US KNEW THAT AND THOSE WHO COME AFTER US WILL KNOW IT. TO REOPEN THAT WAY ANEW EACH TIME IS TO LIVE -- TO CREATE ONE'S OWN WORLD.

HELENE CERTAINLY CREATED HER OWN WORLD. IT WAS A WORLD THAT ALL WHO KNEW HER FELT PRIVILEGED TO INHABIT. SHE GAVE TO THE FOREIGN SERVICE WHAT ONE THINKS OF AS THE BEST QUALITIES OF THE AMERICAN WEST, WHERE SHE WAS BORN AND SCHOOLED -- INDEPENDENCE, DIRECTNESS, ENERGY, AND A SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE. SHE WAS AN ARTICULATE -- AND SOMETIMES A FIERCE -- DEFENDER OF AMERICAN INTERESTS. SHE COULD BE ARGUMENTATIVE AND COMBATIVE, AND SHE BROUGHT TO HER JOB A HEALTHY SKEPTICISM AND AN ACID HONESTY.

YET SHE WAS ALWAYS FAIR. SHE HAD A REMARKABLE CAPACITY TO SEE THE OTHER POINT OF VIEW. AND SHE HAD GREAT HUMOR AND COMPASSION. EVEN HER ADVERSARIES RESPECTED HER. WHEN SHE UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 STATE 108495

RETURNED TO ISTANBUL AFTER FIRST LEARNING SHE HAD CANCER, SHE FOUND WAITING FOR HER A TIN OF CAVIAR FROM THE SOVIET CONSUL GENERAL.

HELENE WAS OFTEN AT THE CENTER OF THINGS. SHE WAS THE DESK OFFICER FOR CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN THE SUMMER OF 1968, WHEN THE SOVIETS INVADED. SHE BROUGHT TO THE CONFUSION AND FRENZY OF THOSE DAYS TIRELESSNESS, CALM, ASSURANCE, AND - MORE THAN THAT - A CLEAR INSIGHT INTO THE SOVIET MOTIVATION AND MENTALITY AND A DEEP COMPASSION FOR THE CZECHOSLOVAK NATION AND PEOPLE.

LAST SUMMER, WHEN SHE HAD BEEN IN ISTANBUL ONLY A MONTH, LIBYAN TERRORISTS ATTACKED THE ISTANBUL AIRPORT AND KILLED FOUR PASSENGERS BOARDING AN EL AL FLIGHT, ONE OF THEM AN AMERICAN. HELENE SENT COMPLETE AND ACCURATE REPORTS DURING A CHAOTIC SITUATION. SHE SAW THAT THE INJURED WERE CARED FOR. AND SHE PERSONALLY VISITED THOSE HOSPITALIZED AND TIRELESSLY CONSOLED AND COUNSELLED THOSE STRANDED. THE

STATE DEPARTMENT RECEIVED A PROFUSION OF LETTERS FROM U.S. PASSENGERS ON THE EL AL FLIGHT AND THEIR RELATIVES AS WELL AS FROM MANY MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, ALL OF THEM COMMENDING HELENE. TYPICALLY, SHE DIDN'T SEE ANYTHING EXCEPTIONAL IN WHAT SHE HAD DONE. INSTEAD SHE TOOK GREAT PAINS TO PRAISE THE OTHER MEMBERS OF HER STAFF.

THIS MORNING WE RECEIVED A TELEGRAM FROM HELENE'S COLLEAGUES AT THE CONSULATE GENERAL IN ISTANBUL. IT READS:

WE WHO HAD THE GOOD FORTUNE OF KNOWING AND WORKING WITH HER QUICKLY CAME TO APPRECIATE HER FINE QUALITIES. SHE COMBINED A KEEN MIND AND BROAD VISION WITH A DEEP SENSE OF COMPASSION FOR HER FELLOW MAN. HELENE BATJER REFLECTED IN EVERY WAY THE HIGHEST IDEALS OF THE FOREIGN SERVICE; WE ARE PROUD TO HAVE SERVED WITH HER. HER COURAGE AND GOOD CHEER IN FACING HER LONG AND DIFFICULT ILLNESS WERE AN INSPIRATION TO ALL OF US.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 04 STATE 108495

TION TO ALL OF US.

THERE IS A 500-YEAR-OLD LEGEND FROM HELENE'S BELOVED YUGOSLAVIA, WHICH DESCRIBED THE EVE OF THE EPIC BATTLE OF KOSSOVO IN 1389, WHEN THE SERBS LOST THEIR INDEPENDENCE TO THE TURKS. ACCORDING TO THE LEGEND, A GRAY FALCON FLEW TO KOSSOVO FROM JERUSALEM TO ANNOUNCE TO THE SERBIAN RULER, TSAR LAZAR, THAT NOT ONLY WOULD HIS SOLDIERS LOSE THE BATTLE BUT HE HIMSELF WOULD DIE. I DON'T KNOW WHEN HELENE FIRST SAW HER GRAY FALCON. BUT I DO KNOW THAT SHE FACED DEATH -- AS SHE FACED EVERYTHING -- WITH DIRECTNESS, DIGNITY, AND GRACE. WE WHO SURVIVE, WHOSE LIVES SHE GRACED, WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER HER.

CHRISTOPHER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TEXT, DEATHS, SPEECHES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 13-May-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977STATE108495
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: RCEWING:EUR/P:WZIMMERMANN:LB
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770179-0344
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770560/aaaabzsf.tel
Line Count: 154
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 4eb2a494-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN EUR
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10-Dec-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2532527
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR HELENE BATJER
TAGS: PDIP, CDES, (BATJER, HELENE A)
To: ISTANBUL
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/4eb2a494-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009